



## Olive Harvest Festival Kicks Off in Wine Country

By Courtney Humiston

The grapes have long been crushed and the vines are settling into dormancy, but there is another harvest happening all over the North Coast that, like the 2012 grape vintage, is both more bountiful and of better quality than the area has seen in years. Olive trees that line many a wine estate's driveway are, it turns out, more than just decorative: Their juice, especially right now when it's fresh, may just be better than any imported olive oil you will find on supermarket shelves.

Olive trees have been growing in northern California for over a hundred years, but, for mostly obvious reasons, they haven't really caught on the way wine grapes have (the Press Democrat reports that olive trees cover a mere 567 acres compared to wine grape's 600,000 in Sonoma County). But buying olive oil from the same place you buy your wine is more than just a romantic notion and gift-y novelty. Unlike most wine, olive oil is best when it is super fresh, and also unlike wine, is usually not vintage-dated. Meaning, it's difficult to determine when the oil you are buying was actually pressed: A good argument for buying local (and right now).

California's harvest season, which began in mid-November, is well underway with places like the Olive Press in Sonoma and McEvoy Ranch in Petaluma already churning overtime. But the festivities officially begin on December 1st with the symbolic blessing (then pressing) of olives at the Sonoma Mission.

The 12th annual Olive Festival, which runs until February, includes everything from an open house at the Olive Press to a martini competition featuring both local bartenders and local olives. Wineries will, of course, be showing off their wares with special tastings and pairings. Be sure to look for the rare harvest treat of Olio Nuovo or new oil, which is bottled within 24 hours of the olives being harvested, and has a rich and peppery flavor.

A full list of events can be found at [OliveFestival.com](http://OliveFestival.com).